

NASSS Workshop II: Chair's Summary of Discussion (13:30–15:30, July 26, 2009)

HIROBE Izumi

MEIJI UNIVERSITY

Dr. Tanaka Kei presented a paper entitled “Asian Population and Pursuits of American Social Justice: Visualizing Japanese Immigrants” which examined the Japanese pursuit of social justice by analyzing cases of picture marriage. This presentation was followed by comments by Dr. Suga Miya of Tokyo Gakugei University. The floor was then opened for questions and discussion.

Dr. Tanaka successfully argued that “the politics of observation and visualization of the immigrants was used by US government officials and Japanese exclusionists to shape US immigration policy and American notions of race and gender, while the same strategy of self-visualization was used by Japanese immigrants in an attempt to protect their right to marriage.” She emphasized a couple of important points. First, the diplomacy between the United States and Japan greatly influenced the admission of the Japanese immigrants into the United States. Second, US government officials and Japanese exclusionists took advantage of the Japanese immigrants’ politics of observation and visualization in order to form American immigration policy and notions of race and gender. She noted that Japanese immigrants also employed a strategy of self-visualization, while also pointing out how immigrants’ visualization politics showed that “social justice involves... the moral qualification of the immigration group.”

Dr. Suga, another leading scholar in the field of migration studies, made a couple of comments on Dr. Tanaka’s paper. Her first point concerned Dr. Tanaka’s argument that “individual immigrants themselves were also active agents in the construction of their self-images by using photography for their own ends.” Professor Suga asserted this argument should be supported empirically. She also suggested that Tanaka should have examined Japanese immigrants’ citizenship and other civil rights cases, and wondered if the struggles for social justice of early Chinese immigrants could be discussed as a linear precedent for the cases involving Japanese immigrants.

Professor Eric L. Muller indicated the difficulty of equating social justice with the right to marry. He astutely pointed out that what mattered here was not the right to marry but the right to migrate, which was not considered to be a fundamental right which derived from social justice.

Professor Kumei Teruko then made some discerning comments and questions including one inquiring about the origins of the term ‘picture bride.’ Professor Yanagisawa Ikumi, an authority on picture brides, provided some very informative comments and information on the issue. A couple of graduate students raised some stimulating and challenging questions and comments, one of which was about the difference between the picture brides, before World War II, and the current practice of finding marriage partners through the internet.

Dr. Tanaka’s presentation had a clear argument, and the variety of photos of Japanese immigrants she projected helped the audience understand the argument greatly. Dr. Suga’s challenging and insightful comments also stimulated a number of queries. This was an excellent session that illuminated numerous questions which migration studies has to tackle.